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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our gracious King, You are the one clear power of love in the midst of lesser powers. Lord, thank You for giving us the confidence to know that You hear and answer prayer.

We pray for those who seek to recover and rebuild after the tornadoes in many States. Have mercy upon them as they deal with the ravages of nature.

Lord, teach our Senators how to discover Your love in each other and to see Your magnificent image in all creation.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Samantha D. Elliott, of New Hampshire, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Hampshire.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, the tornadoes that hit Kentucky this past weekend were some of the most widespread, severe, and devastating in our State's history.

It is still difficult to comprehend the vast scope of the storm. Nearly 40 tornadoes touched down across 6 States. One tornado in Kentucky stayed on the ground for over 200 miles—200 miles. This was potentially the longest continuous path of any tornado in U.S. history.

Towns have been reduced to rubble. Families are picking up pieces of their shattered lives. Most tragically, our Governor announced today that more than 60 Kentuckians are confirmed to have lost their lives. Many more remain unaccounted for.

This is the worst storm to hit Kentucky in my lifetime. The tornadoes have caused considerable damage in 15 counties all across the Commonwealth. Thousands lost their homes. Tens of thousands are still without power. This was, in the words of one meteorologist,

“the worst-case scenario” for destruction. And it came during the Christmas season. Families are supposed to be gathering soon for rest, relaxation, and reunion. Now, so many Kentuckians are facing exactly the opposite.

The whole country is becoming acquainted with Mayfield, KY, likely our hardest hit city. Mayfield is a town of 10,000 in the Jackson Purchase. It has been known for the beautiful Greek Revival facade of the Mayfield First United Methodist Church. Now, First United is completely gone, and the town is literally leveled to the ground.

Mayfield's candle factory was operating in full swing this weekend to keep up with the Christmas demand. It was once a mainstay of the community, employing hundreds. On Friday night, the factory was turned into a scene of absolute horror. Many of the employees who were working that evening are feared dead. Rescue operations are ongoing. At least 40 employees were rescued initially. One was saved after being trapped under 5 feet of rubble for hours. The devastation there is absolute.

The tornado was so powerful that it ripped 27 train cars off their tracks in Earlington and scattered them across a field. A family photograph that was picked up by the storm in Dawson Springs, KY, was carried nearly 130 miles by the wind and discovered over in Indiana.

All across Western Kentucky, residents spent their Saturday and Sunday clearing debris and collecting clothes and possessions that had been scattered. Families were left to inspect the cinderblocks where their houses once stood. The cheery lights of Christmas-time have been replaced by absolute destruction.

Kentucky has been devastated, but we have not been defeated. Kentuckians are resilient people who will stay strong and united through the crisis.

I am incredibly grateful to the first responders who have been on the

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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ground since the outset: Kentucky National Guard, Kentucky State Police, sheriff's departments, city and local law enforcement, EMS responders, firefighters, doctors, and nurses. Quick thinking and selfless action saved lives.

Hard-hit communities are receiving an outpouring of support from across the Commonwealth as well as around the country. Americans near and far are coming together to donate food, blood, resources, and shelter to those in need. Businesses and individuals have helped fund relief efforts and donated to assist the storm's victims.

Like many of my fellow Kentuckians, I was incredibly touched by the support offered by the University of Kentucky basketball team this past weekend. While visiting the University of Notre Dame, they led a deeply emotional moment of silence before their game on Saturday night. The team visited the school's grotto to light candles for storm victims and to pray for recovery. We are all praying alongside them.

Kentucky's State motto is "United we stand, divided we fall." In this time of crisis, Kentuckians are standing shoulder to shoulder, and we will not fail. At every level of local, State, and Federal Government across both political parties, Kentucky's leaders have come together to coordinate and to provide aid.

Toward the end of the week, I will travel back to Kentucky to meet with my constituents and visit the areas affected by the storm. My team has been working nonstop to ensure Kentuckians receive the help that they need.

I have worked closely with President Biden and Governor Beshear to ensure every Federal resource possible is deployed to our State. Kentucky's congressional delegation has come together to send multiple letters to the President in support of disaster relief. In response, President Biden cut through the redtape to approve our requests at an accelerated pace, providing the rapid support we need to recover.

I am especially grateful for the work of DHS Secretary Mayorkas and FEMA Administrator Criswell, who visited Kentucky yesterday to survey damage and to help relief efforts. FEMA has already sent two incident management teams, an urban search and rescue team, and an Army Corps temporary power team. They have turned Kentucky's Fort Campbell into a staging ground for vital relief and supplies. I could not be more grateful for their swift and decisive response to this crisis.

Even in the face of such tragedy, we can be confident that Kentucky will bounce back. We are strong; we are united; and we will come back bigger and better than ever before.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today the prayers of the Senate extend

to all of those impacted by the deadly tornadoes that broke out across the South and Midwest over the weekend. We pray and mourn especially for the people of Kentucky, where far too many lives have been lost and the full extent of the damage has yet to be determined.

Over the weekend, President Biden declared a state of emergency in Kentucky, authorizing FEMA to coordinate disaster relief and provide emergency assistance. He also announced he will travel this week to Kentucky to assess the damage and receive briefings of recovery efforts.

It is likely that the storms from this weekend will go down as some of the worst tornado outbreaks on record, and with heavy hearts we will continue to monitor rescue and first response efforts in the coming days.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on another matter, this week the Senate has a lot to get done as we approach the end of the year.

Over the course of the week, we expect to hold a number of votes to confirm more of President Biden's nominees to serve lifetime appointments to the Federal bench. On that front, we will later vote this afternoon on the confirmation of Judge Lucy Koh to serve as a circuit judge for the Ninth District Court of Appeals. Her nomination was favorably reported out of the committee with bipartisan support.

If confirmed, Judge Koh would be the first-ever Korean-American woman to sit on any circuit court in the country. The daughter of immigrants, her background is an inspiring testament to the American dream. Lucy's mom escaped as a child on foot from the oppression of North Korea, eventually coming to the States. Lucy spent the majority of her own upbringing in rural Mississippi, graduating from both Harvard and Harvard Law School.

For the last 11 years, Lucy Koh has served admirably as a district judge for the District of Northern California. She has authored over 3,000 opinions and presided in 270 cases—everything from the rights of criminal defendants in seeking legal representation to the protection of online consumer data in the hands of companies, to ensuring that the Trump administration did not prematurely end its completion of the 2020 census. She did all those things. She wrote on all those things and offered opinions.

All the while, she has conducted herself with impartiality, excellence, and above all, with fidelity to the Constitution and the rule of law. I have no doubt she will continue building on her excellent judicial record as an appellate judge on the Ninth Circuit, and I look forward to voting in favor of her confirmation later today.

Later this week, we will hold votes on other nominees as well, including Samantha Elliott to serve as a judge for the District of New Hampshire and Jennifer Sung to serve as a circuit judge for the Ninth Circuit.

Once we confirm all three judges—Koh, Elliott, and Sung—the Senate will have confirmed a total of 31 judges to the Federal bench, 11 to the circuit courts, and 20 to the district courts. I am proud to say over half of them are women. Over half of them are people of color.

All of them are outstanding, highly qualified, and they bring sorely needed diversity to the bench—not just personal diversity but professional diversity as well. In decades past, it would have been hard imagining many of these nominees getting a serious look in this Chamber, but one by one, Senate Democrats are working with President Biden to expand the possibilities of who can and who should serve as a judge in this country, and we will keep working.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Madam President, now, on other Senate business and Build Back Better, in addition to making progress on nominees, the Senate has been doing the hard work of putting ourselves in a position to finish our other high-level priorities for the rest of the year.

Last week, we advanced bipartisan legislation that will enable this Chamber to address the debt ceiling on a fast-track basis. For the information of all, the Senate will act tomorrow to prevent default. The Senate will act tomorrow to prevent default.

The Senate could also begin processing the annual Defense authorization bill—negotiated on a bipartisan, bicameral basis—as early as tomorrow. Between now and the end of the year, Members should also expect we will hold votes to confirm even more of the President's nominees.

And on a parallel track, the Senate is moving forward on the reconciliation process so we can vote on President Biden's Build Back Better Act before the Christmas holiday. Committees that received reconciliation instructions have been submitting their final text to the Parliamentarian, the Congressional Budget Office, and to our Republican counterparts.

Throughout the week, both Republicans and Democrats will hold bipartisan Byrd bath meetings with the Parliamentarian. Meanwhile, I will also continue to meet with my colleagues, and I know the President will also continue discussions with them as we hammer out the final details of Build Back Better.

This remains a laborious process, requiring a lot of precision and a lot of pieces moving together. I want to thank my colleagues and their staff and especially the Parliamentarian and her team for their dedication and focus as we approach a vote on the floor.

The work is not yet finished, but we are working hard to put the Senate in a position to get the legislation across the finish line before Christmas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.